



U.S. Senator Judd Gregg, Chairman

Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

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HEALTH EXPERTS TESTIFY TO WORLDWIDE SARS THREAT IN HEARING TODAY BEFORE SENATE HELP COMMITTEE

Washington, DC—Senator Judd Gregg (R-New Hampshire) and the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions today heard firsthand from the world's health experts about the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) which is spreading through Asia and into the United States.

"We are here today because the American people are growing increasingly alarmed about a virus that can be highly contagious, deadly, and for which there is no known treatment," Chairman Gregg said today in his opening statement.

Committee members heard from health officials who are demonstrating an unusual and highly coordinated worldwide health effort to contain the SARS virus. Dr. Julie Gerberding, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention testified today about steps being taken in the United States to protect citizens from the spread of SARS, including an executive order issued Friday by the President which makes it possible to quarantine people who have SARS.

"Cases of SARS continue to be reported from around the world. The disease is still primarily limited to travelers to Hong Kong, Singapore, and mainland China; to health care personnel who have taken care of SARS patients, and to close contacts of SARS patients. Based on what we know to date, we believe that the major mode of transmission is through droplet spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes. However, we are concerned about the possibility of airborne transmission and also the possibility that objects that become contaminated in the environment could serve as modes as spread," said Dr. Gerberding.

Dr. David Heymann, Executive Director of the World Health Organization testified live via satellite uplink from Geneva about efforts being made in other parts of the world to prevent the spread of the disease and to protect people who are not yet infected.

Dr. Heymann also testified that the United States is the only place in the world where work is being done to develop a vaccine for SARS. Chairman Gregg expressed concern about the continued ability of the research community to develop and manufacture vaccines for emerging diseases like SARS.

Dr. Anthony Fauci with the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease testified about cooperative efforts between the CDC, the World Health Organization and other entities to contain the

disease outbreak. He also testified that at this time, disease experts believe the disease to be naturally occurring.

“I would note that no evidence of genetic ‘tampering’ of the virus implicated in SARS has been detected, based on the analyses of the mounting genomic sequence data of the samples from SARS patients examined so far,” said Dr. Fauci.

The disease known as SARS, or Severe Acute Respiratory Illness was first reported in Hanoi, Vietnam and spread rapidly through Asia, into parts of Europe, Canada and the United States. Health experts still do not know precisely how the disease is spread or how to cure it. Health experts are working in a worldwide effort to contain the disease and find a cure. Since the outbreak began there have been at least 89 deaths worldwide from SARS, including at least seven in Canada. There have been no SARS related deaths so far in the United States.

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